

**OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES TRADE REPRESENTATIVE  
EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT  
WASHINGTON, D.C.  
20508**

---

**USTR PRESS RELEASES ARE AVAILABLE ON THE USTR WEBSITE AT [WWW.USTR.GOV](http://WWW.USTR.GOV).**

---

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
DECEMBER 8, 2000**

**00 - 85  
CONTACT: BRENDAN DALY  
AMY STILWELL  
TODD GLASS  
(202) 395-3230**

**U.S. Encouraged by Strong Message on  
E-Commerce from the WTO General Council**

U.S. Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky said today that she is encouraged that a majority of World Trade Organization Members strongly supported key principles on electronic commerce, saying these will help lead to global economic growth.

“The WTO has taken a positive step forward in the promotion of e-commerce,” said Ambassador Barshefsky. “The General Council’s broad endorsement of critical principles on e-commerce will enhance the ongoing work of the WTO under the 1998 Declaration on e-commerce, and demonstrates a continued commitment to addressing the concerns of developing countries in this vital area of the global economy.”

Ambassador Barshefsky noted that the General Council's actions lay the foundation for progress on a U.S. proposal for a “networked world” initiative that would create coherent trade rules supporting a borderless global economy. She noted that a trading system that provides comparable treatment for electronic business as it does for conventionally traded commerce will enable governments, businesses and consumers around the world to use new telecommunications infrastructure and new technologies such as the Internet to engage in international trade and commerce.

The WTO General Council addressed the Work Program on Electronic Commerce during its meeting held in Geneva yesterday and today. The General Council reviewed the reports from four WTO subsidiary bodies on their respective work on e-commerce under the 1998 Declaration, in which WTO Members pledged to support “duty-free cyberspace,” which ensures that electronic transmissions over the Internet remain free from tariffs.

After reviewing these reports, the Chairman of the General Council, Kare Bryn, noted that a majority of WTO members stated their support for the following principles and action on e-commerce:

First, Chairman Bryn said that the work of the subsidiary bodies has demonstrated that “electronic commerce falls within the scope of our existing WTO agreements.”

Second, the Chairman said that “application of the liberal multilateral trading system’s rules and principles to this sector, and the avoidance of unnecessary restrictive measures, can only help to promote the growth of e-commerce and, consequently, the contribution it can make.”

Third, Chairman Bryn said that WTO Members recognize “the tremendous potential of e-commerce and the Internet to contribute to infrastructure capacity building and market access, particularly for developing countries.”

Finally, the General Council proposed to meet in January to discuss organizing its work in the coming year, either through an ad hoc task force or special session of the General Council, to examine certain issues affecting e-commerce that cut across the various subsidiary bodies of the WTO, such as the classification of certain digital products.

In agreeing with these principles, several Members noted the need for the WTO to take a leadership role in promoting a transparent and positive trade environment for economic growth.

Ambassador Barshefsky stated: “We are encouraged by the number of Members who expressed support for these principles, and the United States looks forward to substantially deepening our work in this area with all Members in the coming year.”